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REPORT OF THE UNITED NATIONS HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR REFUGEES

Addendum

REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF THE PROGRAMME OF THE UNITED NATIONS HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR REFUGEES ON THE WORK OF ITS FORTY-SEVENTH SESSION*

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I. INTRODUCTION

A. Opening of the session

1. The Executive Committee of the High Commissioner's Programme held its forty-seventh session at the Palais des Nations in Geneva from 7 to 11 October 1996. It was opened by the outgoing Chairman, Mr. Jakob Esper Larsen (Denmark), who began by remarking on the ever-increasing burden of work that UNHCR faced.

2. Mr. Larsen noted that, despite much concern over precarious situations in many areas of the world confronted by refugee problems, a number of positive developments, including major voluntary repatriations in Mozambique, South-East Asia, Ethiopia, Eritrea and Myanmar, brightened the picture somewhat. He cautioned, however, that such achievements could not overshadow the fact that, at the beginning of 1996, over 26 million persons were identified as of concern to UNHCR.

3. Key elements in meeting this challenge, he suggested, were further advances in preventive action, efficient emergency relief mechanisms and inter-agency coordination. He considered the Conference on the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and its Plan of Action valuable preventive initiatives and urged that momentum not be lost in the follow-up process.

4. The outgoing Chairman encouraged continued efforts towards improving cooperation and coordination in humanitarian relief operations, linking relief and rehabilitation with development assistance.

5. In his closing comments Mr. Larsen commended UNHCR's change management initiative for its efforts to enhance transparency and efficiency both at Headquarters and in the field. In conclusion, he encouraged adoption of the new working methods of the Executive Committee and urged the Standing Committee to take maximum advantage of the opportunity for improved governance provided by the new arrangements.

B. Election of officers

6. Under rule 10 of the rules of procedure, the Committee elected the following officers by acclamation:

Chairman: Ambassador Ali Mchumo (United Republic of Tanzania)

Vice-Chairman: Mr. Björn Skogmo (Norway)

Rapporteur: Mr. Peter Schoof (Germany)

C. Representation on the Committee

7. The following members of the Committee were represented at the session:

Algeria, Argentina, Australia, Austria, Bangladesh, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, China, Colombia, Denmark, Ethiopia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Holy See, Hungary, India, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Ireland, Israel, Italy, Japan, Lebanon, Lesotho, Madagascar, Morocco, Namibia,

Netherlands, Nicaragua, Nigeria, Norway, Pakistan, Philippines, Russian Federation, Spain, Sudan, Sweden, Switzerland, Thailand, Tunisia, Turkey, Uganda, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, United Republic of Tanzania, United States of America, Venezuela and Zaire.

8. The Governments of the following States were present as observers:

Afghanistan, Angola, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Benin, Bhutan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Botswana, Brunei Darussalam, Bulgaria, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Central African Republic, Chile, Côte d'Ivoire, Croatia, Cuba, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Djibouti, Dominica, Ecuador, Egypt, El Salvador, Eritrea, Gabon, Ghana, Guatemala, Haiti, Iceland, Indonesia, Iraq, Jordan, Kazakstan, Kenya, Kyrgyzstan, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Malawi, Malaysia, Mali, Malta, Mauritania, Mexico, Monaco, Mozambique, Myanmar, Nepal, New Zealand, Peru, Poland, Portugal, Republic of Korea, Romania, Rwanda, Senegal, Slovakia, Slovenia, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Swaziland, Syrian Arab Republic, Tajikistan, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, Uruguay, Uzbekistan, Viet Nam, Yemen, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

9. The European Commission, the International Committee of the Red Cross, the Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, and the Sovereign Order of Malta were also represented as observers.

10. The United Nations system was represented as follows:

United Nations Office at Geneva, Centre for Human Rights, Department of Humanitarian Affairs, United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), United Nations Volunteers (UNV), United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), World Food Programme (WFP), United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat), United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR), United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD), International Labour Organization (ILO), Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), World Health Organization (WHO), World Meteorological Organization (WMO) and United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO).

11. The following intergovernmental organizations were represented by observers:

League of Arab States, Organization of African Unity (OAU), Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC), Council of Europe and International Organization for Migration (IOM).

12. A total of 90 non-governmental organizations (NGOs) were represented by observers.

D. Adoption of the agenda and other organizational matters

13. The Executive Committee adopted by consensus the following agenda: 1/

1. Opening of the session.

2. Election of officers.

3. Adoption of the agenda and other organizational matters.

4. Annual theme: the pursuit and implementation of solutions.

5. Reports on the work of the Standing Committee on international protection and programme, administrative and financial matters.

6. Consideration and adoption of programme budgets.

7. Reports relating to programme oversight.

8. Executive Committee working methods.

9. Inter-sessional meetings of the Standing Committee in 1997.

10. Consideration of the provisional agenda of the forty-eighth session of the Executive Committee.

11. Any other business.

12. Adoption of the draft report of the forty-seventh session of Executive Committee.

13. Closing of the session.

E. Opening statement by the Chairman of the Executive Committee

14. The incoming Chairman, Mr. Ali Said Mchumo (United Republic of Tanzania), congratulated Ireland on its entry to the Executive Committee and commended the outgoing bureau for the dedication, skill and accomplishment with which it executed its work.

15. Mr. Mchumo observed that he was assuming his position at a time when the problems of forced displacement weighed heavily on the international community, particularly on hard-pressed countries in the developing world, and a time when the scale and complexity of existing refugee problems continued to be a source of deep concern.

16. With the institution of asylum coming under increasing strain and disquiet mounting over the costs of refugee assistance and the security threat posed by refugee movements, Mr. Mchumo identified a clear need to promote solution-oriented and preventive approaches to refugee protection. He hoped that the annual theme of the forty-seventh session, the pursuit and implementation of durable solutions, would further clarify the policy options and practical approaches available to UNHCR.

17. The Chairman also drew attention to a number of positive developments in various parts of the world. The refugee quandary in the Great Lakes region of

Africa, however, continued to elude effective solutions and compromised prospects for peace and stability in the whole area. The Chairman voiced his hope that UNHCR and the Executive Committee would be able to draw on positive experiences in order to promote the durable solutions urgently required.

18. The Chairman stressed that, in order to ensure the sustainability of solutions, it was also crucial to link short-term rehabilitation assistance with broader recovery and reconstruction strategies. In this context, he recalled the Standing Committee's wide-ranging discussions on Economic and Social Council resolution 1995/56 of 28 July 1995, which provided an opportunity to review aspects of the relationship between relief and development.

19. Mr. Mchumo concluded by expressing his commitment to working with the Executive Committee, in a spirit of solidarity and humanitarianism, over the next year and by paying tribute to the High Commissioner and her staff for the dedication with which they carried out their work.

II. WORK OF THE FORTY-SEVENTH SESSION

20. The High Commissioner delivered an opening statement to the Executive Committee, which is reproduced in annex II to the present report. The full account of the deliberations of the Committee, including the statements or other interventions made by delegations on all the agenda items of the meeting, as well as the closing statements by the Chairman and the High Commissioner, are contained in the summary records of the session.

III. DECISIONS AND CONCLUSIONS OF THE COMMITTEE

A. Conclusions on international protection

1. General conclusion on international protection

21. The Executive Committee

(a) Recognizes that the complexity of current refugee problems underlines both the fundamental importance of the High Commissioner's primary function of international protection and the difficulties inherent in the exercise of this function;

(b) Reiterates that the High Commissioner's international protection function can only be carried out effectively with the full support of Governments, in particular through the provision of durable solutions; and welcomes the continued readiness of States to receive and protect refugees as well as to make available resources to meet refugee needs;

(c) Recalls in this regard the fundamental importance of the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol, in particular their implementation in a manner fully compatible with the object and purpose of those instruments; and welcomes the accession of South Africa and Kyrgyzstan to the 1951 Convention and the 1967 Protocol, bringing to 132 the number of States parties to one or both instruments;

(d) Urges all States that have not yet done so to accede to and implement fully the 1951 Convention and its 1967 Protocol and relevant regional instruments for the protection of refugees, as applicable, thereby strengthening the framework of international protection;

(e) Invites States parties to the 1951 Convention and/or the 1967 Protocol which, at the time of accession, made reservations with respect to any provisions of those instruments to review such reservations with a view to their withdrawal;

(f) Recalls its reaffirmation of the competence of the High Commissioner in supervising the application of international instruments for the protection of refugees, and reminds States parties to the 1951 Convention and/or the 1967 Protocol of their undertaking to provide the High Commissioner with detailed information on the implementation of those instruments;

(g) Recalls also the importance of addressing the problem of statelessness, including through accession to the 1954 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons and the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness, welcomes the accession of Brazil and Guatemala to the 1954 Convention and of Azerbaijan to both statelessness conventions, and calls upon other States to consider accession to those instruments;

(h) Recognizes that countries of asylum carry a heavy burden, including in particular developing countries with limited resources and those which, owing to their location, host large numbers of refugees and asylum-seekers; reiterates in this regard its commitment to uphold the principles of international solidarity and burden-sharing; and calls on Governments and UNHCR to continue to respond to the assistance needs of refugees until durable solutions are found;

(i) Distressed at the widespread violations of the principle of non-refoulement and of the rights of refugees, in some cases resulting in loss of refugee lives, and seriously disturbed at reports indicating that large numbers of refugees and asylum-seekers have been returned and expelled in highly dangerous situations; recalls that the principle of non-refoulement is not subject to derogation;

(j) Reaffirms the fundamental importance of the principle of non-refoulement, which prohibits expulsion and return of refugees, in any manner whatsoever, to the frontiers of territories where their life or freedom would be threatened on account of their race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, whether or not they have formally been granted refugee status, or of persons in respect of whom there are grounds for believing that they would be in danger of being subjected to torture, as set forth in the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment;

(k) Deplores violations of the right to personal security of refugees and asylum-seekers, including sexual and other attacks, especially on women and children, and appeals to all States to abide by their international obligations to protect the physical security of refugees and asylum-seekers and to take measures to ensure that such practices cease immediately;

(l) Expressing concern at the misuse of asylum procedures, calls upon States that have adopted measures aimed at discouraging abusive use of asylum procedures to ensure that those measures have no detrimental effect on the fundamental principles of international protection, including on the institution of asylum;

(m) Recalls its conclusion 77 (XLVI), which encouraged the High Commissioner to engage in consultations and discussions concerning measures to ensure international protection to all who need it and called on UNHCR to organize informal consultations on this subject; supports UNHCR's activities to date in respect of such consultations and discussions; and encourages UNHCR to continue this process, keeping the Executive Committee informed;

(n) Notes with satisfaction UNHCR's activities with regard to the promotion and dissemination of refugee law and protection principles and calls upon the High Commissioner to continue to expand and strengthen the promotion and training activities of the Office, including in the area of prevention and reduction of statelessness and related nationality issues, with the active support of States and through increased cooperation with other international organizations, non-governmental organizations, academic institutions and other relevant organizations;

(o) Recalls its request that UNHCR support and promote efforts by States towards the development and implementation of criteria and guidelines on responses to persecution specifically aimed at women, welcomes in this context the convening by UNHCR in February 1996 of the Symposium on Gender-Based Persecution, the purpose of which was to share information on States' initiatives in this respect, and encourages UNHCR to continue and strengthen its efforts for the protection of women having a well-founded fear of persecution; and calls on States to adopt an approach that is sensitive to gender-related concerns and which ensures that women whose claims to refugee status are based upon a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons enumerated in the 1951 Convention and its 1967 Protocol, including persecution through sexual violence or other gender-related persecution, are recognized as refugees;

(p) Stresses the importance of UNHCR's being granted access to asylum applicants and refugees in order to enable the Office to carry out its protection functions in an effective manner;

(q) Notes that voluntary repatriation, local integration and resettlement are the traditional durable solutions for refugees, while reaffirming that voluntary repatriation of refugees is the most preferred solution, where feasible;

(r) Reaffirms its conclusion 67 (XLII) on resettlement as an instrument of protection and as a durable solution, and welcomes the action taken recently by UNHCR, including the issuance of the Resettlement Handbook on criteria and procedures, and encourages training activities to support resettlement operations in the field;

(s) Acknowledges the resettlement efforts undertaken by Governments and the efforts being made by UNHCR to take full advantage of resettlement opportunities and to find solutions for individual refugees considered in need of resettlement, and in this connection urges Governments to respond actively to the resettlement needs of refugees in a spirit of burden-sharing;

(t) Encourages the regular exchange of information as part of the ongoing consultations of UNHCR with Governments and NGOs on resettlement;

(u) Reiterates the right of all persons to return to their countries and the responsibility of all States to accept and facilitate the return and reintegration of their nationals, and recommends to States that strategies for facilitating the return, in safety and with dignity, of persons not in need of international protection be examined within a framework of international cooperation;

(v) Encourages UNHCR in this context, in cooperation with other appropriate international organizations, to continue the consultative process initiated in 1995 on the question of how the return process can be facilitated;

(w) Recalling the interrelationship between protection and solutions, as well as the desirability of prevention, including through the respect for human rights and the implementation of relevant instruments and standards, with particular attention to the responsibilities of States to resolve refugee situations and, especially with respect to countries of origin, to eliminate causes of refugee flows, calls on UNHCR to continue its activities in support of national legal and judicial capacity-building where appropriate, and to cooperate with the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and other relevant organizations in this regard.

2. Comprehensive and regional approaches within a protection framework

22. The Executive Committee,

Recognizing that the underlying causes of large-scale involuntary population displacements are complex and interrelated and encompass gross violations of human rights, including in armed conflict, poverty and economic disruption, political conflicts, ethnic and inter-communal tensions and environmental degradation, and that there is a need for the international community to address these causes in a concerted and holistic manner,

Reaffirming in this regard conclusion No. 40 (XXXVI) on voluntary repatriation, which states that the aspect of causes is critical to the issue of solutions and that international efforts should also be directed to the removal of the causes of refugee movements; stressing further that the essential condition for the prevention of refugee flows is sufficient political will by the States directly concerned to address causes which are at the origin of refugee movements,

Recalling its encouragement to the High Commissioner to engage in consultations on possibilities and initiatives in specific areas with complex problems of coerced population movements as well as on achieving the objective of providing international protection to all who need it,

Noting that the prevention of and response to such situations may be beyond UNHCR's mandate and capacity,

Further noting that internally displaced persons remain within the territorial jurisdiction of their own countries and that the primary responsibility for their welfare and protection lies with the State concerned,

Aware that involuntary displacement, in addition to the human suffering involved, can impose significant intra-regional burdens, and may also affect security and stability at the regional level,

Acknowledging the desirability of comprehensive approaches by the international community to the problems of refugees and displaced persons, including addressing root causes, strengthening emergency preparedness and response, providing effective protection and achieving durable solutions,

(a) Emphasizes the responsibility of States to ensure conditions that do not compel people to flee in fear, to uphold the institution of asylum, to create conditions conducive to voluntary repatriation, to take steps to meet essential humanitarian needs and to cooperate with countries on which the large-scale presence of refugees weighs most heavily;

(b) Reaffirms the value of comprehensive approaches in which UNHCR has played a significant part, through its presence and activities in countries of origin as well as countries of asylum, notably the CIREFCA process, the Comprehensive Plan of Action and the repatriation to Mozambique; and recalls that the High Commissioner is mandated to promote voluntary repatriation by taking initiatives including promoting dialogue between all the main parties, facilitating communication between them, and by acting as an intermediary or channel of communication;

(c) Underlines the value of regional cooperation, as illustrated by these approaches, in addressing involuntary displacement in a manner which encompasses the political dimension of causes;

(d) Recalls that, while there is no blueprint for such approaches, protection considerations should govern the entire process towards solutions, and standards should be applied consistently;

(e) Encourages States, in coordination and cooperation with each other, and with international organizations, if applicable, to consider the adoption of protection-based comprehensive approaches to particular problems of displacement, and identifies, as the principal elements of such approaches:

(i) The protection of all human rights, including the right to life, liberty and the security of person, as well as to freedom from torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment; the right to leave one's own country and to return; the principle of non-discrimination, including the protection of minorities; and the right to a nationality;

(ii) Promotion of the rule of law through national legal and judicial capacity-building;

(iii) Respect for the institution of asylum, including the fundamental principle of non-refoulement, and ensuring international protection to all those who need it;

(iv) Measures to reinforce international solidarity and burden-sharing;

(v) Support for long-term sustainable development;

(vi) Integration of developmental approaches into the relief stage by strengthening national capacities;

(vii) Support for rehabilitation, reintegration and reconstruction measures which will underpin the sustainability of repatriation;

(viii) Public information to raise awareness about refugee and migration issues in both host countries and countries of origin, particularly with a view to countering xenophobia and racism;

(ix) The establishment and fostering of mechanisms designed to avoid or reduce the incidence of conflict, as conflict may result in population displacement, and of reconciliation measures where necessary and possible, notably in post-conflict situations, to ensure the durability of solutions;

(x) Education for peace and human rights, including at the community level, in both countries of origin and countries of asylum;

(f) Invites UNHCR to provide its support and expertise in formulating comprehensive approaches and assisting States in exploring more systematically where and how such approaches might be appropriate and feasible.

B. Conclusion on the Conference on the Commonwealth of Independent States

23. The Executive Committee,

Recalling General Assembly resolutions 49/173 of 23 December 1994 and 50/151 of 21 December 1995, in which the High Commissioner, in close consultation with concerned States and in coordination with relevant intergovernmental, regional and non-governmental organizations, was requested to convene, in 1996, a regional conference to address the problems of refugees, displaced persons, other forms of involuntary displacement and returnees in the countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), and relevant neighbouring States,

(a) Expresses its appreciation to the Government of Switzerland and other host Governments and donors for making the process possible;

(b) Welcomes the report of the Conference held at Geneva on 30 and 31 May 1996 and the Programme of Action adopted thereat;

(c) Applauds the spirit of international solidarity and cooperation that made the Conference a success;

(d) Expresses appreciation to the High Commissioner for initiating and supporting a constructive dialogue among a wide range of Governments, resulting in agreement on a comprehensive approach for practical action, taking into account internationally recognized norms and standards and the protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms, and providing a solid foundation for further action by the CIS countries, other interested States and international and non-governmental organizations;

(e) Welcomes the close and innovative cooperation of the High Commissioner with the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) in carrying out the work of the Conference;

(f) Approves the initial steps undertaken by the High Commissioner in cooperation with IOM to promote implementation of the Programme of Action;

(g) Welcomes the Joint Operational Strategy of the High Commissioner and IOM in the CIS countries for 1996-2000, which outlines the practical dimensions of implementing the results of the Conference;

(h) Underlines the urgent need to address the problems of those displaced, to implement measures to prevent situations leading to further involuntary population displacement and to manage other types of migratory flows in the region;

(i) Urges the CIS countries that have not yet done so to accede to and implement fully the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol;

(j) Reaffirms the view of the Conference that, while primary responsibility for tackling population displacement problems lies with the affected countries themselves, the serious challenges cannot be met by the limited resources and experience of the CIS countries alone;

(k) Urges Governments of the CIS countries to continue to strengthen their commitment to the principles underpinning the Programme of Action and to ensuring progress in its implementation;

(l) Calls upon other interested States to reaffirm their commitment to those principles and to provide appropriate forms and levels of support for the implementation of the Programme of Action;

(m) Recognizes the key role to be played by non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in the implementation of the Programme of Action, and encourages Governments of the CIS countries as well as international organizations to strengthen their cooperation with NGOs and to involve them actively in the follow-up to the Conference, in accordance with the spirit of UNHCR-NGO Partnership in Action (PARinAC);

(n) Calls on the High Commissioner to continue to cooperate with IOM and OSCE in coordinating ongoing and future activities in the CIS countries and in steering and monitoring progress through appropriate follow-up mechanisms;

(o) Requests the High Commissioner to keep the Executive Committee informed of measures taken and proposed, and of progress achieved in the implementation of the Programme of Action.

C. Conclusion on the implementation of Economic and Social Council resolution 1995/56

24. The Executive Committee,

Recalling that the Economic and Social Council, in its resolution 1995/56 of 28 July 1995 on the strengthening of the coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance of the United Nations, requested the governing bodies of relevant organizations of the United Nations system to review the role and operational responsibilities as well as the operative and financial capacities of their respective organizations to respond, within their mandates, in the context of broad and comprehensive humanitarian programmes, and welcoming the work undertaken by the Standing Committee in response to that resolution, notably in respect of emergency response, solutions, prevention and coordination,

Recalling also the unique mandate of UNHCR for the provision of international protection to refugees and the search for solutions to their problems, and recalling that the Executive Committee and the General Assembly have requested UNHCR to extend assistance and protection to returnees in the context of its mandate for the promotion of solutions,

Recalling further that prevention of forced displacement is one of the major challenges facing the international community,

Recalling that UNHCR may be called upon by the appropriate organs of the United Nations and with the consent of the State concerned, to extend its assistance to other groups, such as internally displaced persons, and recognizing that such involvement may contribute to the prevention or mitigation of refugee situations,

Recognizing the range of mechanisms developed by UNHCR to respond to crises of displacement as an important contribution to the overall response capacity of the United Nations, including through the provision of community-based assistance to returnees in the form of quick-impact projects which are in accordance with national development plans,

(a) Emphasizes the importance to UNHCR of greater predictability and timeliness on the part of the United Nations system as a whole in emergency response and the pursuit of solutions, and strongly asserts the importance of effective inter-agency coordination in this respect;

(b) Calls on UNHCR to continue its efforts to ensure the full effectiveness of its emergency preparedness and response mechanisms, and urges the Office, in its relations with other intergovernmental and non-governmental agencies, to continue to pursue the development of common standards and practices for responding to emergencies;

(c) Underlines the leadership role of the Emergency Relief Coordinator in ensuring a coordinated response to complex emergencies through early implementation of a clear division of labour and an appropriate coordination mechanism decided by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC), bearing in mind the mandates and capacities of the agencies concerned;

(d) Calls on UNHCR to continue to participate actively in the IASC as the primary mechanism for inter-agency decisions on system-wide policy issues relating to humanitarian assistance, for formulating a coherent and timely response to major disasters and complex emergencies, as well as for inter-agency decisions of an operational nature, and urges the Office to play its part in ensuring that the IASC fully develops its foreseen institutional role;

(e) Urges UNHCR to work within the IASC to examine as a matter of priority options and proposals (a) to improve the functioning of the IASC and its Working Group, (b) to strengthen the role of the IASC in reaching decisions and providing inter-agency guidance to the United Nations system, and (c) to increase the effectiveness of the IASC secretariat, including, inter alia, through increasing IASC members' support for and involvement in preparations for IASC meetings; and stresses the importance of recommendations to these ends being included in the Secretary-General's report to the 1997 substantive session of the Economic and Social Council;

(f) Calls also on UNHCR to participate actively in the efforts of the IASC to undertake a systematic analysis of various models of coordination, with a view to ascertaining their comparative effectiveness in responding to different situations;

(g) Underscores the importance of establishing Memoranda of Understanding with intergovernmental agencies, including at the level of field operations, as a mechanism to ensure that operations are effective, complementary and predictable; welcomes the recent conclusion of Memoranda of Understanding between UNHCR, UNICEF and UNFPA; urges UNHCR to continue its efforts to establish predictable operational relationships through the conclusion or enhancement of Memoranda of Understanding and other agreements with relevant partners, notably UNDP and WHO; and calls upon the High Commissioner to report to the Standing Committee on lessons learned from such inter-agency agreements;

(h) Calls on UNHCR to continue its active participation in the consolidated appeals process, urges the Office to support efforts to ensure that consolidated appeals reflect priorities established through joint needs assessments and strategic planning and are effectively coordinated with other resources mobilization efforts, including round tables and consultative group mechanisms, and stresses the importance to UNHCR of the timely issue of appeals, their alignment with the calendar year and their responsiveness to the regional dimensions of complex emergencies;

(i) Underlines the importance of effective inter-agency training in preparing personnel for a coordinated approach to emergencies and welcomes the Complex Emergency Training Initiative coordinated by the Department of Humanitarian Affairs;

(j) Underlines also the importance of contingency planning as a prerequisite for effective emergency response, and strongly encourages ongoing efforts to establish common guidelines, as well as to undertake joint contingency planning activities, including through the focal point established

in the Department of Humanitarian Affairs for preparedness and response measures related to the use of government assets in support of humanitarian operations;

(k) Emphasizes the importance of joint needs assessments as a basis for an integrated response, under the guidance of the Department of Humanitarian Affairs, to complex emergencies and also of joint monitoring and evaluation of the collective response of the United Nations system, and looks forward to their becoming a regular feature of emergency operations;

(l) Urges UNHCR to continue to work with the IASC to develop ways of implementing effective and predictable linkages between humanitarian assistance, rehabilitation and development in countries of origin and to analyse lessons learned in this regard;

(m) Calls on UNHCR to continue to participate in efforts, coordinated by the Department of Humanitarian Affairs, to ensure that humanitarian agencies have access to early information regarding potential flows of refugees and displaced persons;

(n) Calls also on UNHCR to continue to collaborate actively with the IASC in its efforts to establish an effective and predictable division of labour in respect of internally displaced persons;

(o) Reaffirms that, while the need for UNHCR involvement with returnees in their countries of origin may vary depending on particular circumstances of each case, such involvement must be limited in scope and duration and should, from the outset, include a clearly defined strategy, in cooperation with the Government concerned and in consultation with the donor community and relevant United Nations agencies, to ensure the sustainability of reintegration after UNHCR's withdrawal;

(p) Recognizes that the institutions responsible for sustaining the rule of law play an important role in removing the causes of refugee movement and, in this context, calls on UNHCR to continue its efforts, at the request of the Government concerned and in close collaboration with other relevant actors, in particular the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, as well as regional organizations, where appropriate, to reinforce national legal, judicial and administrative capacity, including training opportunities;

(q) Given the limited mandate, expertise and resources of UNHCR, stresses that its involvement in such activities should be limited in scope and duration and, wherever possible, be undertaken from the outset in close collaboration with concerned Governments as well as with agencies with specific competence in the fields of development and human rights;

(r) Recognizes that initiatives to address and resolve the problem of statelessness have an important role to play in the prevention of refugee movements, and calls on UNHCR to continue its efforts in this respect;

(s) Emphasizes the important role of the Department of Humanitarian Affairs in bridging and integrating the discussions taking place in various intergovernmental forums as well as in the IASC process, and underscores the need for intensified efforts to ensure that these discussions converge into a commonly held and comprehensive set of objectives and proposals;

(t) Calls on UNHCR, in coordination with the Department of Humanitarian Affairs, to report to the January meeting of the Standing Committee on progress

made in the inter-agency consultations on the formulation of a comprehensive set of proposals, recommendations and options for submission to the substantive session of the Economic and Social Council in 1997.

D. General decision on programme, administrative and financial matters

25. The Executive Committee

(a) Confirms that the activities proposed under General and Special Programmes as set out in document A/AC.96/865 have been found, on review, to be consistent with the statute of the Office of the High Commissioner (General Assembly resolution 428 (V)), the High Commissioner's "good offices" functions as recognized, promoted or requested by the General Assembly, the Security Council or the Secretary-General, and the relevant provisions of the Financial Rules for Voluntary Funds Administered by the High Commissioner for Refugees (A/AC.96/503/Rev.6); 2/

(b) Requests the High Commissioner, within the resources available, to respond flexibly and efficiently to the needs currently indicated under 1997 General and Special Programmes which are tentatively estimated at $1.1 billion, and to any other new needs that might arise, bearing in mind the statute of the Office and the priority to be accorded to statutory activities, and the relevant provisions of the Financial Rules for Voluntary Funds;

(c) Approves the revised 1996 General Programmes budget amounting to $445,327,000 as detailed in document A/AC.96/865 (table II.4, column 3);

(d) Approves likewise the country/area programmes, other programmes and the headquarters budgets under the 1997 General Programmes amounting to $370,556,900, as well as $25,000,000 for the Emergency Fund, $20,000,000 for the Voluntary Repatriation Fund and a Programme Reserve of $37,055,100 (representing 10 per cent of programmed activities), all of which are detailed in document A/AC.96/865 (table II.4, column 4), and which constitute a 1997 total General Programmes budget of $452,612,000, and authorizes the High Commissioner, within this approved level, to effect adjustments in project, country/area programme, other programmes and the headquarters budgets, as may be required by changes affecting the refugee/returnee programmes for which they were planned;

(e) Notes the report of the Board of Auditors to the General Assembly on the accounts of the Voluntary Funds administered by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees for the year ended 31 December 1995, 3/ the report of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions on UNHCR activities financed from voluntary funds: report for 1995-1996 and proposed budget for 1997, 4/ and on UNHCR inspection and evaluation activities, 5/ and requests to be kept regularly informed on the measures taken to address the recommendations and the observations raised in these various oversight documents;

(f) Notes the observation of the Advisory Committee that the combined total of programme delivery costs and administrative support costs measures have increased considerably, and requests UNHCR to prepare a report on the issue, to be presented to the Standing Committee in the course of the first half of 1997, including on the possibilities of defining more precisely and in a standardized manner the various categories of costs, and illustrating how the categories are reflected in the UNHCR budgets for 1996 and 1997;

(g) Notes with satisfaction the outcome of the informal consultations on the headquarters support costs for non-governmental implementing partners and the decisions taken by the Standing Committee on this question at its second and third meetings in 1996;

(h) Urges Member States, in the light of the extensive needs to be addressed by the Office of the High Commissioner, to respond generously and in a spirit of solidarity, and in a timely manner, to her appeals for resources;

(i) Approves the transfer of an amount up to $500,000 from the 1997 Programme Reserve to the Fund for International Staff Housing and Basic Amenities;

(j) Requests UNHCR to explore further with the Board of External Auditors its proposals for the audit of implementing partners as set out in document EC/46/CRP.45, in particular the scope of the proposed audit certification, bearing in mind the comments of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions and the specific proposals of the Under-Secretary-General for Internal Oversight Services on the issue; 6/

(k) Notes the comments of the Advisory Committee on the range of issues related to internal audit, and requests UNHCR to prepare a comprehensive paper on these issues, taking into account the report of the Secretary-General prepared pursuant to General Assembly resolution 48/218 B of 29 July 1994, for consideration by the Standing Committee in the course of 1997;

(l) Requests UNHCR to prepare a consolidated paper on the issue of the proposed rental of the new UNHCR headquarters for presentation to the Standing Committee with a view to taking a decision on the matter at the earliest possible opportunity before 31 December 1996.

E. Decision on working methods of the Executive Committee

26. The Executive Committee,

Recalling the decision of its forty-sixth session that new Executive Committee working methods would be introduced on an experimental basis for one annual cycle of meetings and that their application would be reviewed at the end of the forty-seventh plenary session in October 1996, 7/

(a) Decides, on the basis of experience gained since the forty-sixth session, that the revised working methods provide a sound basis for the organization of the annual cycle of Executive Committee and Standing Committee meetings and that these methods should be definitively adopted;

(b) Also decides that the rules of procedure of the Executive Committee should be revised to reflect these changes in accordance with the proposals put forward in document A/AC.96/868, annex II;

(c) Further decides to initiate consultations among Executive Committee members on the participation of NGO observers in the work of the Executive Committee and its Standing Committee, bearing in mind revised arrangements for NGO consultation with the Economic and Social Council and further discussions to take place at the fifty-first session of the General Assembly;

(d) Authorizes the Standing Committee to review the results of these consultations at one of its meetings in 1997.

F. Decision on the programme of work of the Standing Committee in 1997

27. The Executive Committee,

Having reviewed the issues before it at its forty-seventh session, including the annual theme on the pursuit and implementation of durable solutions and the report on the work of the Standing Committee, 8/ and bearing in mind the decisions and conclusions of its forty-sixth session,

(a) Decides to include the following issues in the programme of work of its Standing Committee in 1997, and requests that UNHCR include in its documentation on each item the relevant recommendations of the auditors and the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions as well as steps taken to implement those recommendations and related Executive Committee decisions and conclusions:

(i) International protection:

a. Note on international protection;

b. Follow-up to the conclusions on international protection;

c. Statelessness;

d. Update on the informal consultations on international protection for all who need it;

e. UNHCR's activities for refugee law promotion, dissemination and training;

f. Return of persons not in need of international protection;

g. Exclusion and cessation clauses under the 1951 Convention and its Protocol;

(ii) Protection/programme policy issues:

a. Refugee women: framework for implementation of the Beijing Plan of Action;

b. Refugee children, including UNHCR's strategy for follow-up to the report on the impact of armed conflict on children;

c. Refugee health and nutrition;

d. Economic and social impact of large refugee populations on host developing countries;

e. Refugees and the environment;

(iii) Programme and funding matters:

a. Region-by-region reviews of General and Special Programmes;

b. Updates on programmes and funding, including reviews of the use of the emergency fund, programme reserve and voluntary repatriation fund;

c. Programme delivery and administrative support costs;

(iv) Management, financial and human resources matters:

Project Delphi;

(v) Oversight issues:

a. Implementing partners (audit certification, training and performance evaluation);

b. Internal audit;

c. Procurement;

d. Programming (budgets, management and control) and financial (statements) issues;

e. Information system strategy and IMIS;

f. Follow-up of the evaluation of UNHCR's response to the Rwanda emergency;

(vi) Coordination issues:

a. Follow-up to Economic and Social Council resolution 1995/56;

b. PARinAC;

c. The evaluation of Memoranda of Understanding as a mechanism of coordination;

(vii) Governance issues:

a. Selection of the annual theme for the forty-eighth session of the Executive Committee;

b. Review of Executive Committee working methods, including observer participation;

(b) Authorizes the Standing Committee to add items, as appropriate, to its inter-sessional programme of work;

(c) Calls on the Standing Committee to report on its work to the forty-eighth session of the Executive Committee.

G. Decision on the provisional agenda of the forty-eighth session

28. The Executive Committee

Decides to adopt the following provisional agenda for the forty-eighth session of the Executive Committee:

1. Opening of the session.

2. Election of officers.

3. Adoption of the agenda and other organizational matters.

4. Annual theme.

5. Reports on the work of the Standing Committee as they relate to:

   (i) International protection;

   (ii) Programme, administrative and financial matters.

6. Consideration and adoption of programme budgets.

7. Reports relating to programme oversight.

8. Inter-sessional meetings of the Standing Committee in 1998.

9. Consideration of the provisional agenda of the forty-ninth session of the Executive Committee.

10. Any other business.

11. Adoption of the draft report of the forty-eighth session.

12. Closing of the session.

H. Government observer participation in 1996-1997

29. The following observer Governments have applied to participate in the work of the inter-sessional meetings of the Standing Committee from October 1996 to October 1997:

Angola, Bulgaria, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Chile, Croatia, Cuba, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Egypt, Guatemala, Iraq, Kenya, Kyrgyzstan, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, Luxembourg, Malaysia, Mexico, New Zealand, Poland, Portugal, Republic of Korea, Senegal, Slovakia, Syrian Arab Republic, Swaziland, Ukraine, Uruguay, Viet Nam, Yemen, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

Notes

1/ A/AC.96/864.

2/ A/AC.96/503/Rev.6.

3/ A/AC.96/869.

4/ A/AC.96/865/Add.4.

5/ A/AC.96/870.

6/ EC/46/SC/CRP.45/Add.1.

7/ A/AC.96/860, para. 32.

8/ A/AC.96/875.

ANNEX I

Decisions adopted by the Standing Committee in 1996

In accordance with the authority vested in it by the Executive Committee, the Standing Committee in 1996 adopted a number of decisions on matters included in its programme of work. The texts of those decisions are annexed to the reports of the different Standing Committee meetings as follows:

A/AC.96/861. Report of the first meeting of the Standing Committee (30-31 January 1996):

I. Decision on programme and funding;

II. Decision on the medium-term plan;

III. Decision on property;

IV. Decision on international procurement;

V. Decision on UNHCR financial rules.

A/AC.96/862. Report of the second meeting of the Standing Committee (10-11 April 1996):

I. Decision on programme and funding;

II. Decision on the support costs of international NGO partners;

III. Decision on audit follow-up: programme and financial management;

IV. Decision on Executive Committee documentation;

V. Decision on amendments to the work programme of the Standing Committee.

A/AC.96/873. Report of the third meeting of the Standing Committee (25-27 June 1996):

I. Decision on the annual theme for the forty-seventh session of the Executive Committee;

II. Decision on programme and funding projections;

III. Decision on lessons learned from the Rwanda emergency;

IV. Decision on internal oversight mechanisms;

V. Decision on headquarters support costs of international NGO partners.

A/AC.96/874. Report of the fourth meeting of the Standing Committee (16-17 September and 2 October 1996):

Project Delphi.

ANNEX II

Opening statement by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees to the Executive Committee of the High Commissioner's Programme at its forty-seventh session

(Monday, 7 October 1996)

I am pleased to welcome you to the forty-seventh session of the Executive Committee. May I extend a special welcome to the delegation of Ireland. In view of your country's support for humanitarian action, your election as a member of this Committee is a further reinforcement of the team we try to form in the interest of uprooted populations.

I should like to commend the outgoing Chairman, Mr. Jakob Esper Larsen of Denmark, for his excellent cooperation during the past year and for the professional manner in which he has steered all of us through the new and intensive process of Standing Committee meetings. I am confident that we can now count on the leadership of the new Chairman, Mr. Ali Mchumo of the United Republic of Tanzania, whose country remains at the forefront of one of the most serious refugee crises in recent times. Let me congratulate you and the new Bureau upon your election.

Since the previous session of this Committee there have been no new humanitarian emergencies of the scale witnessed during the first half of this decade. The international environment remains, however, volatile, and armed conflict in Burundi, Chechnya in the Russian Federation, Liberia, the Sudan, Sri Lanka, Tajikistan and, most recently, Iraq have again forced people to flee for their lives. The world's refugee population decreased from 14.5 million in early 1995 to 13.2 million earlier this year and is clearly outnumbered by internally displaced persons. At the beginning of 1996, the overall population of concern to the Office stood at some 26.1 million. Africa remains the region with the highest number of refugees, followed by Asia, Europe, Latin America and North America. While there has been important progress towards durable solutions in many parts of the globe, there remain enormous new challenges in several post-cold-war conflicts. I shall revert to them later in my statement.

I welcome the accession of South Africa to the 1951 Convention and the Organization of African Unity Refugee Convention, and I understand that the accession of Kyrgyzstan is virtually completed. I also appreciate the incorporation of many protection and human rights standards in the Programme of Action agreed at the Conference on the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), the adoption in the European Union of a common interpretation of the Conventional refugee definition and the establishment of guidelines by some States regarding claims of gender-specific persecution. I welcome these developments, which should further strengthen the international protection regime.

The continuing attachment to refugee protection standards in theory has in many places not been matched by observance in practice. Many States have continued to open their borders to large numbers of refugees, the Islamic Republic of Iran being the most recent example. In many other States, however, access to territory has been either denied outright as a result of push-offs of boat arrivals and rejections at borders or complicated by new legislative restrictions. Deadly attacks on refugee camps, sexual abuse of refugee women and children, forcible conscription of refugee men and children and abusive

detention have seriously undermined safety during asylum. And, thirdly, the voluntary nature of repatriation is increasingly being undermined by a mounting number of forcible returns.

The core values of safe and adequate protection are the central concern of my Office. In order to preserve them, I believe that it is first of all crucial that the international community not only reaffirms, but respects the principle of non-refoulement. Providing safety against danger is at the heart of protection and reflects fundamental values common to all cultures. People seeking safety should not be rejected at borders, nor returned from further inland, before it has been properly determined that they will not be in danger.

Secondly, I should like to appeal to those bearing political responsibility to combat the negative perceptions surrounding asylum-seekers and refugees in the larger context of migration. In many countries of the industrialized world, the processing of asylum requests has become much swifter, and numbers have continued to decrease in 1996. Although manifestly unfounded and abusive asylum requests have not disappeared, it is time for asylum problems to be de-dramatized in political rhetoric and the public mind, and it is essential for States to continue to differentiate between those seeking protection and those seeking better opportunities.

Thirdly, we must pay more attention to international burden-sharing: it is increasingly evident that where burden-sharing fails, protection problems rise. The burdens are very unevenly divided, between and within continents. Germany hosts more Bosnian refugees than all other countries in Western Europe together. During my mission to Côte d'Ivoire and Guinea this spring, I visited regions where Liberian refugees outnumbered the local population. The same is true in many other countries, from the Ngara region in the United Republic of Tanzania, to Goma in Zaire to areas in Pakistan. I am very worried that appeals such as those by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and UNHCR to alleviate the huge environmental and other damages in eastern Zaire and western parts of the United Republic of Tanzania have gone largely unheeded.

Fourthly, in the interest of protection we must collectively try to diminish the growing international security dimension of refugee situations. It is essential that the humanitarian character of asylum be preserved, by receiving refugees away from borders, by halting military activities in refugee camps and by obliging refugees to respect the law. Refugees are entitled to freedom of opinion and expression, and as they have often fled from political problems, the political engagement of some of them is understandable. However, the humanitarian and non-political character of asylum could be endangered if the freedom of expression of asylum-seekers were boundless. Countries of asylum may therefore restrict the political activities of refugees, if necessary and in line with human rights standards.

The risk of inter-State tension is compounded when international protection is abused by people not deserving it, because they are guilty of genocide or other heinous crimes. As we are experiencing so painfully in the camps in Zaire and Tanzania, there can be huge practical, legal and especially security problems in identifying and isolating such persons, action that is moreover the primary responsibility of asylum States. On our part, we have now officially excluded from our mandate all those Rwandans who have been indicted by the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda. We are currently also designing guidelines which should help States and our own staff to handle the difficult question of exclusion as consistently as possible.

Constantly reaffirming the principle of non-refoulement, combating prejudices about asylum-seekers, increased burden-sharing and measures against the misuse of asylum must be combined with redoubled efforts to avert and resolve conflict and to provide more effective protection to internally displaced and other civilian populations during conflict.

This brings me to the pursuit and implementation of durable solutions to refugee problems, which is the annual theme of this Executive Committee. In its long history, and again this year, UNHCR has helped millions of refugees to integrate, to resettle and especially to repatriate. Although this work has never been easy, the challenges are now becoming even bigger. Today, we are called upon to solve displacement following cruel inter-group rather than ideological conflict. In essence we have to deal with the huge challenge of reconciliation in the transition from conflict to real, lasting peace.

Bosnia and Rwanda demonstrate that the establishment of military peace is insufficient in societies that emerge deeply divided from fierce communal conflict. There the establishment of civilian peace, of reconciliation in the broad sense, becomes a still greater challenge than separating armies or physical reconstruction. It requires at least a minimum consensus on the future make-up of society, which cannot be imposed from the outside, and a fair balance between the often competing demands of peace and justice, of forgiveness and ending impunity. It requires just and humane solutions for those who were deliberately chased away in order to establish ethnic hegemony or territorial control. Whereas in almost all situations of conflict solutions for refugee problems require some form of peace, the reverse is often equally true: humane solutions are essential for peace.

The link between refugee problems and peace and security is perhaps nowhere more evident than in the Great Lakes region in Africa. After 15,200 Rwandan refugees were returned from Burundi in late July, the ongoing turmoil in that country prompted virtually all 65,000 remaining Rwandans to repatriate, with the material and monitoring assistance of my Office. However, during all of 1996, less than 15,000 of those Rwandans who had fled in 1994 returned home from Zaire and the United Republic of Tanzania, leaving 1.6 million people behind. The dangerous security implications of this refugee situation have now escalated. Cross-border raids, the targeting of survivors of the genocide and attacks on Tutsi residents in the Kivu region of Zaire, resulting in armed resistance, are causing more deaths and are undermining prospects for reconciliation.

Probably never before has my Office found its humanitarian concerns in the midst of such a lethal quagmire of political and security interests. While our humanitarian assistance and protection serve an innocent, silent majority of needy and anxious refugees, they also serve the militants who have an interest in maintaining the status quo. This cannot go on. In order to bring about large-scale repatriation, we have formulated a set of proposals on which we hope to reach agreement with affected and interested Governments in the coming days. Only through a comprehensive approach encompassing security, justice, political interests and humanitarian considerations can this problem be solved. I wish to commend the Rwandan Government for its courage in enacting the Genocide Law, and the Zairian and Tanzanian Governments for coping with a tremendous refugee burden. I appeal again to the international community to do more to relieve this burden.

Turning now to Bosnia and Herzegovina, we estimate that since the conclusion of the Dayton Agreement already 250,000 people, mostly internally displaced persons, have settled or resettled in areas where their group is in

the majority. Inter-entity returns, especially to the Bosnian Serb entity, continue to face many political, psychological and practical obstacles. Yet there are hopeful signs of progress. Following the recent elections, work is in progress on the building of common institutions. Reconstruction works are finally gathering some pace, especially in the 22 target areas launched by my Office. Some 20,000 homes have been repaired through UNHCR's shelter project. There have been some breakthroughs in the pilot projects for return within the Federation, and a small number of Muslims are being allowed to work on their houses on the Serb side of the inter-entity line. Our buses are running across the lines of division. I firmly believe that we must continue to build bridges between the people of Bosnia.

We must not give up on the right of people to return to their homes, while we should at the same time create conditions making it possible to rebuild their lives elsewhere, within Bosnia and in the region. Our initial consultations with the authorities of the countries concerned on a regional plan of action have been promising. A regional approach would also allow for more progress on solutions for refugees and displaced persons from Croatia, including Eastern Slavonia. Many of the problems and their solutions are interlinked. Let me in this context express my appreciation of Croatia's recent new and much broader Amnesty law.

As conditions in Bosnia improve further - and the forthcoming municipal elections should be an important indicator - the time will come for the lifting of temporary protection. Those unable to return to their home areas should, however, not be pushed back, as long as they will not have a decent roof over their head and a decent alternative solution in sight.

The difficulties in Bosnia and Rwanda should not obscure the historic progress made in resolving forced displacement elsewhere. We should all be inspired by the process of reconciliation in Guatemala, South Africa and Mozambique. In the latter country, in spite of 17 years of atrocious conflict, the peaceful reintegration of 1.7 million refugees worked, and in July this year we were able to end our involvement there. I should make specific mention also of Mali, where the ethnic dimensions of conflict did not preclude reconciliation, and where this year we helped some 50,000 Tuareg refugees to repatriate.

This year we have been able to conclude the Comprehensive Plan of Action for Indo-Chinese refugees. Thanks to an impressive show of international cooperation 1,075,000 Vietnamese and Laotian refugees have, since 1975, benefited from protection in the region followed by resettlement. I should also like to commend Viet Nam for its efforts in receiving back almost 100,000 returnees, and I hope it will make an additional effort to clear the return of the remaining 12,000 persons in Hong Kong.

In many other places there is progress towards solutions. Since October last year, we have assisted some 50,000 refugees to return to Togo. We are trying to help more refugees to go home to Somalia, in addition to the estimated 500,000 Somalis who have repatriated in the last few years. I wish to express my appreciation to the Governments of Ethiopia and the Sudan for the successful voluntary repatriation of some 27,000 Ethiopian refugees since December 1995. In Angola, in spite of the slow progress in the implementation of the Lusaka Protocol, some 30,000 refugees have returned spontaneously and we are gearing up our capacity for larger movements in future.

I sincerely hope that, following the recent events in Afghanistan, as many refugees as possible will start the journey home, in peace and in full respect of their human rights, particularly those of women. We also hope to receive the clearance of the Government of Myanmar for the voluntary return of the remaining 40,000 refugees in Bangladesh, which would enable UNHCR to strengthen its monitoring and reintegration activities in Rakhine State, thus helping to improve conditions there. At the same time I count on the Government of Bangladesh to provide UNHCR with access to any new asylum-seekers. I am grateful to the Royal Bhutanese Government for having engaged in a dialogue with my Office regarding the refugees who have received generous asylum in Nepal. I repeat my readiness to cooperate in the implementation of any satisfactory arrangements Bhutan and Nepal might reach towards solving this complex problem.

This overview should provide us hope: refugee problems are less insoluble than they often appear to be. In most cases, however, solving them requires time. In situations where refugees have fled from war, although they increasingly return or are pushed to return to unstable conditions, real progress towards peace is almost always a prerequisite for ending their predicament in a lasting manner. This also applies to the Caucasus. During a recent joint mission with the Department of Humanitarian Affairs to Armenia and Azerbaijan, we discussed proposals to prepare for the return and reintegration of some 1.1 million refugees and displaced persons, who fled as a result of the conflict over Nagorny Karabakh. Although our proposals were well received, it became clear that progress on the humanitarian front will be intimately linked to a favourable evolution of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Minsk Group negotiations. Similarly, we will pursue our efforts to include the humanitarian dimension in the peaceful settlement of the Abkhaz and South Ossetian disputes in Georgia.

Although peace cannot be imposed from the outside, international cooperation and involvement are in many ways indispensable to solve problems of forced displacement. Let me in this context appeal once again for increased international support to the peace efforts of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) in Liberia, so that the predicament of 750,000 Liberian refugees will finally end. International cooperation implies of course in the first place the responsibility of countries of origin to readmit their citizens, whether refugees or rejected asylum-seekers. Both the Comprehensive Plan of Action and Mexico's recent praiseworthy decision to offer many remaining Guatemalan refugees possibilities for integration, remind us of another aspect of international cooperation: it may be necessary to complement voluntary repatriation with other pragmatic solutions.

It has become very clear that the international community must help countries emerging from conflict to cope with the complicated transition from war to peace, and with resuming development. Early planning, early coordination and early action by all international actors involved are necessary. The absence of visible peace dividends can clearly compromise the process of peace-building and healing. Through community-based approaches and a focus on human as well as material needs and by involving women, these dividends can contribute to reconciliation. At the same time we have learned, for example from our operation in Mozambique, that UNHCR's quick implementation projects must be accompanied by timely efforts to ensure their sustainability, once we leave. Not being a developmental organization, my Office must leave as soon as our refugee work is completed. Finally, for the challenges of refugee return and reconciliation the building of fair systems of justice and efficient mechanisms for property restitution have proven to be increasingly important.

The women and children who survived Srebrenica and Rwanda have reminded us starkly that more must be done to help them and many others to overcome their traumas and to restart their lives. Following the Bosnian Women's Initiative Fund, for which I would like to thank the Government of the United States of America, I am considering a new initiative to help the women and child survivors of the genocide in Rwanda. In the context of refugee protection and assistance as well, the needs of women and children deserve more attention, by the international community and also within UNHCR. Having elaborated specific guidelines on women and children issues, having appointed focal points and regional advisers and having stepped up gender awareness training, we must allow our full attention to these needs to permeate all our activities. I also intend to examine carefully the recommendations of the study on the impact of armed conflict on children, undertaken by Mrs. Graça Machel, with whom UNHCR has closely cooperated.

While I hope that we shall continue to move towards solutions, UNHCR's next challenge will be to better frame and concretize its contributions, however modest, to avert unnecessary displacement. By injecting some humanity into conflict situations, humanitarian action can help to contain them, to prevent their spilling over and to avert refugee flows. By re-anchoring returning refugees in their communities and by promoting reconciliation, we can help to prevent the recurrence of conflict. However, within the limits of our mandate and against relatively low costs, we need to do more in the following areas: reduction of statelessness, strengthening the capacity of local NGOs and administrative structures, humanitarian advocacy, and encouraging regional dialogue.

Following last year's Conclusion on Statelessness, we have already advised some Governments, for example the Czech Republic, on sometimes sensitive citizenship issues. Local institutions and NGOs are not only critical to ensuring protection and sustaining rehabilitation; but they can also reinforce good governance. Promoting awareness of refugee and humanitarian standards is especially relevant in regions where we have been able to reduce our presence, such as Latin America and South-East Asia. Most importantly, we need further efforts to encourage dialogue on how to prevent, manage and solve displacement through comprehensive regional initiatives, such as the CIS Conference we organized this spring together with OSCE and IOM.

Dialogue, standard setting and material help were the outcome of the CIS process, and I call upon the donor community to enable us to start implementing our projects, for example for the Crimean Tatars in Ukraine and in support of the migration service of the Russian Federation. Building on our positive experience with the CIS Conference, I have decided, in close consultation with the Secretary-General, to explore the possibility of a similar process for the countries of Central and South-West Asia, which, while being faced with some of the largest and longest refugee crises in modern times, have continued to extend their hospitality to refugees in the best tradition of Islam. The initial reaction of these countries has been promising and I am very grateful to them.

Let me devote the last part of my statement to perhaps my most crucial objective for the coming period: to deliver the changes necessary for UNHCR to perform better with less. Last year, I announced initiatives in this direction, and I was pleased that, last week, the Standing Committee was able to assess the progress achieved under UNHCR's change process, better known as Project Delphi.

The objective of Delphi is nothing more or less than to give UNHCR better tools to perform its central mission of ensuring international protection and achieving durable solutions, in an ever more complex and critical environment.

Our programmes and operational structures will be based on better defined objectives tailored to the needs of each situation, but at the same time consistent with the overall strategic directions of the Office. We have already begun to introduce a new operational orientation, which we have taken to calling the "situational" approach. While ensuring protection and assistance, this approach will gear us more towards finding and exploiting openings for solutions. In addition, greater delegation and support should enable our managers to take greater responsibility, while more finely tuned and expanded oversight from the centre should allow us to better hold them accountable for reaching their objectives.

I am pleased that we have been able to start implementing Project Delphi. As delegations are aware, I have reorganized our senior management structure. We are reducing unnecessary bureaucratic layers, which, I hope, will bring me closer to what is happening on the ground, at the point of delivery of our services. We are making progress in developing clear policy directives. Following consultations with all my representatives earlier this year, we have issued a global strategy paper, which, together with the research undertaken in the new Centre for Documentation and Research, should better inform the content of our policy and decision-making process. Planning and evaluation capacities have been strengthened. I am also insisting that all representatives and other senior managers acquire advanced management training.

On the human resources side, I am pleased to report that we have now launched our new Career Management System. We expect the new performance appraisal to assist our staff in planning and advancing their careers, to introduce greater accountability for accomplishing specific work objectives and to enable the organization to assign the right people to the right place.

With working processes streamlined and greater authority delegated to the field, I expect that UNHCR will need fewer human resources, particularly in Geneva. Anticipating a reduction of 250 staff at headquarters, I have instituted a freeze on external recruitment, and further measures are planned to contain the impact of the reductions on staff. My Director of Human Resources Management is working, in close consultation with the Staff Council, to prepare a transition strategy.

Your broad support will encourage the process of change at UNHCR. From the beginning our staff has been involved in UNHCR's change process, and I remain committed to continuing this broad-based approach.

I have come to the end of my statement. While we try to perform the best we can, we need your continued moral as well as financial support. Against a total budget of some $1.3 billion, our funding situation now shows $776 million contributed since 1 January, of which $320.5 million is for our General Programmes. I appeal especially to the donors here present to make an extra effort for the serious shortfall in our operations in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, West Africa and most urgently, in the United Republic of Tanzania and Zaire.

Amidst growing pressures and dilemmas, the challenges in sustaining international protection and achieving durable solutions are enormous. More than ever, we depend on the cooperation of all Governments, our United Nations sister agencies, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the NGOs, our crucial partners in action. With the help of all of you, I pledge my determination to continue to serve the victims of war and persecution with my dedicated and able staff.